**Metro State’s Art Purchase Award**

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In the March issue of *The Metropolitan,* the article “Metro State’s Meaning of Art” highlighted artwork at Metropolitan State. Those pieces were commissioned work acquired for display. This article will have a more personal focus, featuring three past winners of the “Art Purchase Award” (APA).

Erica Rasmussen, professor of studio arts and gallery director at Metro State, created the APA 14 years ago. Held every spring, the competition is open to students, alumni and arts faculty. Each winner is awarded $1,000 and their artwork is displayed at Metro State. This is a great way to spotlight the school’s ongoing presence of skillful artistry and creativity.

**Barbara Cobb**

Earning a B.A. in Individualized Studies with a focus on the Arts, Barbara Cobb graduated from Metro State in 2006. Cobb pursues her art whenever she can, working around her full-time job as a graphic designer for an engineering company. She is presently gearing up for the “Edge of the Big Woods Art Wander,” held every year in Carver county. Making it a yearly goal to enter Metro State’s Art Purchase Award, Cobb is also working on some pieces for that event.

Cobb has won the APA two times. The first was a few years after she graduated and is titled “Birch Triptych” (“triptych” meaning a set of three panels side by side). The trees in the piece are made of text clipped from magazine pages. Cobb also added black paint to mimic the look of a birch tree’s bark. To create the small squares, Cobb again used magazines, punching out the multi-colored dots.

Cobb’s other entry is called “Sunday on the North Shore,” for which she won the award last year. This mixed-media piece is made up of hand-dyed silk and hand-made felt—both done by Cobb. There are also some hanging stones, as well as driftwood intertwined with the fabrics. Cobb had found the driftwood while on a trip to her father’s cabin in northern Wisconsin, not far from Duluth.

Cobb’s father had recently suffered a stroke and she went up there to visit him, finding the pieces of driftwood while the two of them were out on a walk along Lake Superior. Cobb decided to combine the elements together, saying that the fabrics reminded her of fall colors. The blue background represents, of course, the water.

In regards to winning the award, Cobb says, “It was really exciting and it meant a lot to me, because it had to do with my father and what he went through.” Yearly involvement in the APA “pushes and challenges me,” Cobb says, “It makes me want to change things up and try different things. It helps me grow as an artist.” Cobb also appreciates having her artwork displayed at Metro State, stating, “How great to have original art in classrooms instead of something purchased from Bed, Bath & Beyond.”

**Judy-Saye Willis**

After retiring from a career in business, Judy Saye-Willis earned her Masters degree in Liberal Studies from Metro State. Graduating in 2010, she now considers herself a full-time studio artist, also teaching some classes. Saye-Willis works with organic, natural dyes and various aspects of surface design. Involving much research and experimentation, some of these techniques date back to the ancient Egyptians and were first referenced by Pliny the Elder in the first century.

Saye-Willis has twice won the APA, the first a five-piece framed series titled “The Place Where I Go To Rest.” Regarding her inspiration, she says, “Life can get very hectic and often an artist needs a quiet place to contemplate their work. The series is a representation of that.” Machine stitching was used in the process and the small colored circles were done with a felting technique.

Saye-Willis won her second APA a few years ago with a two-piece work titled “Space View.” With a whitish half-circle in each piece, Saye-Willis said it reminded her of looking past the moon at the stars and galaxies. She created these pieces on silk using a series of techniques. This included breakdown printing, stenciling, resist apply and then over-dyeing them in an indigo bath.

“It was really quite exciting, it’s nice to have your art in public places,” Saye-Willis says, in response to winning the APA. “I have real strong feelings about Metro State, because I have appreciated what the university does,” she says, adding, “For any artist to get an award like that, it means a lot.”

Saye-Willis recently finished another series titled “From Garden to Gallery: Nature’s Gentle Colors.” The exhibit is now on display at the Paradise Center for the Arts in Faribault, Minnesota. Along with numerous two-dimensional pieces, there are also large panels of dyed fabric hanging from the ceiling.

Saye-Willis created these panels with a technique called Japanese shibori, a manual resist dyeing process that produces various patterns on fabric. Pictures of the exhibit and artwork of Saye-Willis can be found on the Minnesota Prairie Roots website at mnprairieroots.com.

**Bryan Starry**

Having graduated just last December, Bryan Starry earned two B.A. degrees from Metro State, one in Applied Mathematics and the other in Studio Arts. This seemingly odd duo suits Starry well. “Art is always a good relaxation for me,” he says. “I loved and enjoyed the math, but I had to work really hard at it,” Starry says, adding, “So art is always a good balance for the math.” While he is not working his own business as a high-end property manager, Starry works at his craft. “Art talks to people, no matter where you’re at in the world,” he says.

Starry won the APA a few years ago—while still a student at Metro State—with a sculpted piece titled “Solitude.” Indicative of a human figure, it is what Starry calls “a found-object piece.” He came across the materials (that were essentially scraps) at Amble’s Machinery Hardware and Steel Company in Minneapolis. Starry first found the grinding wheel that makes up the head of the piece. He then decided to build the figure around that, using steel and brass tubes, steel plates, galvanized mesh and copper wiring.

Winning the award was a gratifying experience for Starry. “It was nice to have somebody see a piece of my sculpture and say they’d be willing to put up some money for it,” he said. “I had sold jewelry and that sort of thing before but that was the first sculpture piece of mine that I’d ever had purchased, so I was really grateful. It helped me realize that I maybe had something to put out there in the world that other people would want to look at,” Starry added.

Self-employed as a graphic artist for many years, Starry always had an interest in making jewelry. He started out as a jeweler’s apprentice, and something sparked, “The first time I polished a ring in three dimensions and did a really good job on it, I got this chill down my spine and thought, ‘that’s what I have to start doing.’” From there Starry began working in bronze and gold which led to blacksmithing and forging metals.

Starry works out of a foundry in Minneapolis, complete with a kiln and forge (or furnace) for melting metals, and is presently putting the finishing touches on two bronze pieces. Starry will enter these in the Student Salon—running from mid-March to mid-April—at Metro State. The exhibit can be seen in the Gordon Parks Gallery on the library’s third floor. Starry’s various artwork can also be found at bryanstarry-artist.com.

Speaking of his school experience, “I had an awesome time at Metro State,” Starry said, adding, “I had great professors and students to work with. As a school it’s a pretty amazing place. I was really glad I got to leave behind a little piece of me.”